



From Lord Berkeley
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Andrew Stephenson Esq MP
Minister for HS2
Department for Transport,
London SW1

25th October 2021

Dear Andrew,

Wendover Tunnel Option

Thank you for your letter dated 20th July 2021 in response to my letter dated 30th June 2021 on the Wendover Tunnel proposal.

As you have declined my invitation to meet, I would like to take this opportunity to directly respond to the “clarification” points that you set out in your response letter to me:

The role of EKFB

Your claim that EKFB were free at any time to identify and put forward efficiencies including the new OTB Engineering proposal for a tunnel at Wendover completely contradicts the position of the Department for Transport as set out by the then Minister for HS2, Nusrat Ghani MP when she also declined an opportunity to meet with OTB Engineering to discuss the Wendover Tunnel proposal, and stated in a letter (dated 10th April 2019) to the then constituency MP, Rt Hon David Lidington:

“I am also reluctant to allocate more resource and effort to reviewing the (mined tunnel) proposal again.”

With such a clear direction from the HS2 Minister that the Government would not provide more resource and effort to consider the new OTB Engineering proposal for a tunnel at Wendover, it is not surprising that the contractors EKFB decided not to consider the only viable and effective mitigation solution for Wendover. The decision by the HS2 Minister and the Department in April 2019 to decline to meet and further consider the benefits of the Wendover Tunnel proposal provided clear direction to EKFB that the Government would not accept any tunnel proposal to mitigate the HS2 route at Wendover.

Furthermore, HS2 Ltd has consistently refused all reasonable requests from Wendover Parish Council and Wendover stakeholders to meet to consider the tunnel solution at Wendover.

New powers

You state that the construction of the mined tunnel at Wendover would have huge implications in relation to operating within the Environmental Minimum Requirements in the area and would require a comprehensive TWAO assessment process. However, a short scoping exercise would quickly determine the significant environment benefits/disbenefits (if there are any) of the Wendover Tunnel proposal and what additional considerations are at play. HS2 Ltd has already collected all the required baseline information and can draw from other sites along the HS2 Phase One route where tunnelling is currently being used. This could be done quickly and efficiently with no significant impact on the construction timetable of the HS2 Phase One route.

Open face mining

Taking into consideration the ground conditions likely to be present at Wendover, OTB Engineering reiterate the point that open face mining remains entirely feasible at this site. Indeed, there are no conditions likely to occur at Wendover that would present an exceptional hazard or risk to a competent tunnelling contractor.

OTB Engineering understand that the ground conditions at Wendover are not like those at the HS1 North Downs tunnel, as you suggest. OTB's tunnelling methodology is well suited to the anticipated ground conditions at Wendover and can be adapted should ground conditions be 'wetter' or 'fissured.' Indeed, such tunnelling methods were used successfully during the construction of the Channel Tunnel in 3 tunnels on the interface between the chalk and the underlying gault at Castle Hill. In this case, the tunnels all lay beneath the water table (unlike the North Downs tunnel on HS1). Consequently, I am very curious as to the conclusions drawn in your independent engineering assessment and would kindly ask whether you could share them with me?

Release of documents

I am indeed aware of the Department's claims that the mined tunnel proposal at Wendover has been properly and independently evaluated. However, no evidence of the various studies and "independent reports" relating to the mined tunnel proposal has ever been presented by the Department. Indeed, the Department continues to insist that they shall remain confidential. This consistent and stubborn refusal to provide transparency and evidence that the studies and assessments were carried out implies that they were never carried out and were not completed at all. In the interests of transparency and openness, I challenge you to provide some evidence in support of this and the Department's claims, as releasing piecemeal paragraphs and sentences of the so-called reports and studies does not demonstrate that the Department and HS2 Ltd have thoroughly, fairly and honestly appraised the tunnel proposal at Wendover.

Request to meet

It is extremely disappointing that you continue to refuse to engage to discuss a completely viable mitigation solution that is simpler, cheaper, quicker and greener than the current complex, high-risk and damaging HS2 Ltd scheme at Wendover.

To clarify this unsatisfactory situation before construction commences and to meet your own commitment to thorough consideration and appraisal of the tunnel solution at Wendover, I am requesting your assistance to help arrange a technical meeting between OTB Engineering and EKFB / HS2 Ltd engineers with myself present to thoroughly review and consider the tunnel solution v HS2 Ltd's proposed scheme at Wendover.

I look forward to your comment,

Yours Tony

Tony Berkeley